

Man in the middle

Jim Hargrove changed state's approach to criminals

FIRST OF A SERIES ON STATE LEGISLATORS

By Scott Wilson of the Leader

Jim Hargrove's desk is piled with files and papers. Powerful lobbyists wait patiently in leather chairs in the hallway outside his door, hoping for a couple minutes that they might not get.

This is the office of a senator who has been around the Washington State Legislature for a long, long time

— 26 years to be exact, second in total legislative seniority to only one other lawmaker, Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen of Camano Island.

When the 31-year-old blond, stocky Hoquiam for-ester was elected to the House of Representatives for the 24th

District in 1984 and began serving in 1985, Ronald Reagan was president and Mikhail Gorbachev was the new leader of what was then called the Soviet Union. Nobody yet had thought to tear down the Berlin Wall.

In his first campaign, Hargrove identified himself as a conservative, faith-driven, old-fashioned, blue-collar, logging-friendly, tough-on-crime Democrat. Today, a quarter-century later, he does the same. He has been rock-solid in his fiscally and socially conservative views. In a past session, he was the stubborn Democrat who cast a crucial vote in favor of then-Sen. Dino Rossi's Republican budget, infuriating a few other Democrats.

In light of that, it may seem odd to see, among the certificates and plaques on his wall, a handful of awards from liberal associations that represent social services and environmentalists.

There's the 2008 Champion for Children award from the Children's Alliance.

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Sen. Jim Hargrove
D-Hoquiam



Sen. Jim Hargrove has represented the 24th District for 26 years and is the second-longest serving member of the Legislature. He has written or rewritten 127 laws. Submitted photo

And the 2008 Legislative Champion award by the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs.

Also tucked in there is the 2006 Environmental Champion award from Washington Conservation Voters.

Then there's his certificate of membership in the Family Policy Council and the Children's Oversight Committee.

What is going on with Jim Hargrove? Approaching three decades in power, has he gone soft?

BODY OF WORK

Just the opposite, said the 57-year-old. Instead, he's seeing the results of a quarter-century of legislative work that has focused on

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Hargrove: Continuing into 26th year

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prevention instead of punishment. Others are acknowledging what even he calls his "body of work."

"My mantra is: I want to be tough on crime by preventing it, not by being tough on crime by hammering someone who has committed it," he said. "I've been doing that in conscious fashion since the mid-1990s, but looking back, I've really been doing it since the late 1980s."

Due to the combination of his long tenure and his focus on the data of actual outcomes rather than guesswork and the politics of emotion, Hargrove has had the pleasure of seeing the laws he has enacted work for both their targets and the taxpayers.

It's likely that nobody in Washington state has had as much influence on the evolution of preventative social and criminal services as has Jim Hargrove, said Marty Brown, director of the state Office of Financial Management (OFM). In various capacities, including top Senate staff, legislative director for two governors and director of OFM, Brown has worked the marble hallways of Olympia for 33 years.

"Our juvenile population is way down, mostly because of things he either thought up or was instrumental in getting through," said Brown. "The diversion programs, the drug courts, many other things. He recognized early on that yes, there are times when offenders need to be incarcerated, but in some cases, prisons are just places where these folks learn to get worse."

Hargrove's laws say that diversion is often a better, and much cheaper, option,

said Brown.

A couple of concrete examples: The state is poised to close down two expensive facilities, the juvenile incarceration center at Maple Lane School in Centralia and the adult prison outside Tacoma, McNeil Island Corrections Center, because of the falling number of inmates, said Brown. The numbers are falling because Hargrove's body of law is working, he said.

Eldon Vail, director of the Washington State Department of Corrections, agreed.

"He has had a huge impact on the juvenile system and is working to have the same impact on the adult system," said Vail, who has been director or deputy director of state prisons for 10 of the last 13 years. Recidivism, or the return of offenders to the criminal justice system, is down, Vail said, "and it's very likely due to the investments that Hargrove has made."

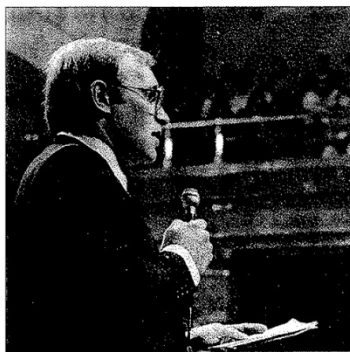
When Hargrove calls, Vail answers.

"He'll call me on a weekend, in session or out of session," Vail said. "When he calls, it's important."

PRAGMATIST AT WORK

"I've always been a problem-solver," said Hargrove. "I've not been political for the most part, at all. My committee [he chairs the Senate Human Services and Corrections Committee] is not political. Last night, we had executive session and moved out 40 bills in 100 minutes. The Republicans are not objecting to bills. We have a high level of trust."

Hargrove first ran for office in 1982 along with Port Townsend attorney Keith



A professional forester, Jim Hargrove was first elected to the state House of Representatives in 1984. Initially, his focus was jobs and forestry. But a liberal House speaker soon tapped him to try reducing the costs of Washington's growing prison population. Submitted photo

Harper. Both lost, Harper by the narrowest of margins, to Richard Fish, who served one term. Hargrove won in his second effort in 1984. As a freshman representative, he was most interested in helping his logging-dependent Grays Harbor County, and his early bills focused on international trade, vessel pilots and economic development.

But Hargrove soon shifted his attention toward the state's most expensive services — prisons and juvenile detention facilities — and the broadening reach of the vast Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

In the 1980s, with many others, Hargrove scrutinized the increasing tendency of the DSHS "super agency" to intervene in the lives of troubled families.

"The department was piling kids into foster care, then not solving the problem and getting them back in the form of juvenile delinquents or criminals," he said. "That got me interested in child abuse and what is the best outcome for kids. My philosophical view was that the kids should be with parents if possible. I saw the data and it said the same thing."

Taking steps to try and keep kids with their parents, under supervision, rather than whisking them away, both worked and saved money, Hargrove said. That meant there was more money to help in other ways.

His key insight? "I came to the understanding early on that the further you go down the track to start changing things, if you change the trend lines by just one degree, you go out 50 years and that widens and widens. Then you can have huge impacts," he said.

KEY INFLUENCES

Speaker Joe King, D-Vancouver, created a subcommittee on prisons and cor-

rections in the late 1980s and named Hargrove its chair. Hargrove recalled King's mandate:

"I want you to figure out how to save money in corrections so we have more money for education," King had said. That got him started on what would become a 20-year task, still ongoing.

Hargrove's legislative career was shaped by other lawmakers, as well.

Following the 1992 election, Hargrove crossed the capitol lobby to the Washington State Senate, replacing the retiring Sen. Paul Conner. There, he was influenced by liberal Seattle Sen. Phil Talmadge. Talmadge was also determined to focus on outcomes, not emotions. Both were tired of hearing, from human services advocates, that the only answer to failed programs was more money.

"No, no, no," said Hargrove. "We have to start evaluating things in different ways. We have to start funding the things that work and not funding the things that don't work."

Sen. Jeanine Long, a Mill Creek Republican, shared the same view.

DRIVEN BY RESULTS

"When I first came, the programs were someone's idea, what they thought might work," Hargrove said. "They would start it, they would fund it, they would justify it based on the constituency built up around it. I wanted to see an evaluation of programs based on the actual outcomes. We started asking for data, baseline data."

At first he found that the data did not exist. There was no real way of knowing what worked and what did not. So he led the Legislature in creating an agency tasked with collecting reliable data. "Then we got in the habit of tracking things, analyzing how they happened over time," he said.

The Hargrove impact What the state data shows

Three weeks ago, a group of conservative activists from Clallam County visited Sen. Jim Hargrove in his Olympia office. Focused on the high cost of state government's social programs, Hargrove responded with the hard data on the impact of legislation he has championed for the past 26 years. It includes these facts:

- The crime rate in Washington has dropped 35 percent since 1990.
- Most states fight crime by imprisoning more people. Washington instead deters one-time offenders from becoming criminals. Had it focused on imprisonment, an additional 18,330 people would be in prison at an added cost of \$1.1 billion.
- Due to a dropping number of inmates, the state is closing the McNeil Island Corrections Center near Tacoma.
- In 1997, the average population in state juvenile detention facilities was 1,426. Today it is 644. Each detained juvenile costs taxpayers \$94,000 per year. The state is closing the Maple Lane School juvenile detention facility in Centralia.
- Recidivism (re-offending) among Washington juveniles dropped from 42 percent in 1995 to 27 percent in 2007.
- The Washington State Institute for Public Policy has determined that investments in deterrence policies cost \$179 million in 2008-2009, but saved \$2.26 billion in taxpayer expenses.
- In Washington, youth are less likely to commit crimes than the youth of other states, and when they do they are far more likely to get effective treatment that prevents them from becoming career criminals.

He also searched other states for successful pilot programs with proven outcomes.

His drive, Hargrove said, arose not from a sudden grand insight. Instead, it developed over time based on a pragmatic approach to spending and laws.

"It wasn't a long-term, 20-year plan," he said. "Instead it was, 'this worked, now let's try that ... wait, drug treatment fits into that. Mental health fits into that.' If there was a philosophy, it was to deal with an issue that presents a more expensive problem later."

Hargrove paused, then added that it was in keeping with his Christian faith.

"The two greatest commandments are to love the Lord and love your neighbor as yourself," he said. "If I'm not working on government to do that for my constituents, who are my neighbors, then I'm not following those commandments."

Further, it reflects what he thinks it means to be a Democrat.

"I believe that government can help people solve their problems," he said. "That's what drove my working on this. If you're just trying to solve problems and not doing it in an efficient way that doesn't save money, then you can't solve as many problems."

STOP THE REVOLVING DOOR

Hargrove soon focused on how to halt the revolving door that kept sending repeat offenders through the criminal justice system and his thinking branched out from there.

He enacted a law, the Becca Law, to require schools to follow up on chronically truant students. He enacted another to monitor what

happened to youth coming out of institutions on parole. He supported the creation of drug diversion programs through local courts, known as Drug Courts and championed by late Jefferson County Superior Court Judge Tom Melhan, among many others.

He passed laws that provided for less jail time and more treatment for drug offenders.

In 2004, he addressed the data-proven link between mental illness, substance abuse and crime. State law had no room for a "dual-diagnosis" offender — someone both mentally ill and

addicted to drugs or alcohol. Hargrove's new law allowed counties to set aside one-tenth of 1 percent of sales tax for a localized treatment program. Jefferson County officials say it has worked.

"We have treated so many people, in the jail, in mental health, in the schools, in home visits, through the courts," said Jefferson County Public Health Department Director Jean Baldwin. "In all cases, we work toward the treatment of substance abuse and mental health. Hargrove really did us a favor."

Jefferson County was the first county among Washington's 39 counties to opt into the program starting July 2006. It cost \$385,000 in 2010.

When Democrats were in power, Hargrove became chair of the Human Services and Corrections Committee. Over time, the Senate swept other responsibilities into his committee, including juvenile services, corrections, family law and mental health.

"It is becoming the Hargrove Super Committee, because I have such a variety of interests there," he joked. That his responsibility has grown is also a reflection of the trust he has developed among other senators.

"He's one of the smartest guys in the place," said Brown, OFM director. "He can explain things to people. People trust him. When that happens, people are going to help you." His stature runs across the rotunda to the House of Representatives, and across party lines to conservative Republicans, said Brown.

"Someone might say, 'this [diversion] is soft on crime,' but they don't go there, because he has the data and the credibility now. People realize he's not a bleeding heart liberal," said Brown.

According to legislative records, since 1985 Hargrove has written or re-written 127 state laws, most of them influencing the way that foster children, homeless people, juveniles, criminals, addicts and the mentally ill are treated by state agencies.